

A Proper Response to Church Leaders

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
Preached on: Sunday, April 17, 2016

Would you take your Bibles and turn to Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5. We come now to verses 12 and 13 in our exposition of this wonderful epistle that speaks so practically to each of our lives. This is actually the last section of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians where he gives a series of exhortations pertaining to life in the fellowship, life in the church; a very important passage of Scripture for every church but especially for this early church that was established here in the very beginning of the church age in the first century. And if we look through the New Testament, we see there are many passages of Scripture that focus heavily on what a Christ honoring, God honoring church really looks like and that's what we find here in the last section of this first epistle to the Thessalonians. Really, he's speaking about how the church should function in a way that honors God. And we could really divide this whole last section into three categories. We're only going to look at the first one here today. The first is: a proper response to church leaders in verses 12 through 13. And then next week we'll look at what he has to say with respect to a proper response to problem members in verses 14 and 15. Then in verse 16 through the rest of the chapter, he deals with a proper response to God himself which we will look at in three weeks from today.

Now, I want you to remember what was really the makeup of this church in Thessalonica. It was composed of two radically different cultures: Jews and Gentiles, and yet now they are all gathered around the same table of fellowship. You think we are different, you think we are diverse? We've got people from many different countries here, different cultures, this was far different than what we experience here at Calvary Bible Church. In fact, in the New Testament, we see the Gentiles described as Greeks, Romans, Macedonians and barbarians and now they are all in equal status. And then on top of that, you've got the Jews who formerly would have nothing to do with any of them. Paul describes the church in Colossians 3:11, he says, "there is no distinction now between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian," which as I've told you before were the most savage of all the barbarians; they would be likened to ISIS that we have here today. You have "barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." Then you add to that the fact that you've got to these Gentile believers that were former idol worshipers involved in all manner of hideous forms of debauchery, now they are serving Christ alongside these Jews that have come to worship Christ and so it's just an amazing thing when you realize what this church really looked like. Most of the church in the New Testament was made up of poor people, however, there were also wealthier people. We know that according to Luke 17, even here in this church, it says that there were a number of the leading Greek women who had believed in Christ and were saved

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and now they are worshiping along with perhaps some of their own slaves that had come to Christ. Imagine what a shock that would be to share a hymnal with your slave, even more difficult if that slave was put in a position of authority as an elder. So now everyone is in the same family so despite all of the long-held prejudices and sheer hatred that they once held for each other, they are all coming together now as this family and Paul, we know, often uses the language of family. In fact, 19 times in 1 Thessalonians alone, he uses the terms "brothers and sisters" so we all share the privileges and the responsibilities and even the problems of family. And every good family must have order to it and so this is what we see in this text, the order being brought to the family. Now, I might also add that sometimes the church in the New Testament is described as the body of Christ, the spiritual organism of which Christ is the head and we are individual members. Other times, it is described as a flock and we are the sheep of that flock and they are shepherds that shepherd the flock and so forth. But regardless of the metaphor, we see that in every case there is guiding leadership, those who direct, those who manage and without leadership and a proper response to leadership, you have chaos. So this is going to be the first issue that Paul deals with in verses 12 and 13 that we'll look at in a moment.

Let me remind you of the importance of having divine structure even in our own families, even a marriage, within a family. We are told, for example, in Ephesians 5:21 that every believer is to be "subject to one another in the fear of Christ." So this is foundational to proper personal relationships in a Christian household and when you have two believers, this is possible; if you have unbelievers, it's not possible. So every Spirit filled family member must humbly submit to the other members of the family out of a sincere love and reverence for God but that principle of mutual submission does not eliminate the distinction and roles even within the family. For example, we are told that Christian wives are to willingly and lovingly submit to the leadership of their husbands which really manifests her supreme submission to the Lord that has asked her to do that very thing. Likewise, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church and was willing to give himself for her and he is also to submit to Christ and children are to obey their parents and so forth, and any deviation from the God ordained structure and distinctive roles in a family will result in chaos in the family. We've all seen this. We've seen men who are abusive to their wives and they failed to lead as a godly shepherd and we've also seen ungodly wives who resent the godly leadership of a husband and we've also see the horror of undisciplined children. We all know what it looks like to see a child centered home where you have some little spoiled brat that's the center of gravity and everyone is orbiting around that child to keep little temper tantrum Tommy from throwing another fit. So you have to have order. You have to have leadership. And by the way, the reason that child centered home has problems is because foolishness is bound up in his heart and the rod of discipline has not yet been applied to drive that foolishness far

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from him so the real problem is not so much the child as it is the parent. The same type of dynamics can manifest itself in a church.

So Paul brings us to these concepts here in this section of Scripture and gives us some exhortations concerning life in the fellowship and he begins with dealing with a proper response to church leaders. Notice what he says in verses 12 and 13,

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

Now, let's think about this. Bear in mind this church was only about a year old when they received this letter and so it is filled with, shall we say, baby Christian. So who are these leaders? Where did they come from? Well, Scripture is silent on this particular issue, however, we do know that it was customary for the apostles and like Timothy and Titus, to exercise godly discernment and appoint elders to serve as leaders in the churches. For example, in Titus 1:5, Paul instructed Titus to, "appoint elders in every city as I directed you." So it would appear that Paul would have appointed certain men to be leaders of that congregation of people and probably some of them would have been poor people, they may even have had some slaves or at least people in the lower socioeconomic ladder that may have been put into that position, maybe people that had never had an opportunity to lead before but the real issue has to do with spiritual qualifications as we are going to see. And as I was thinking about this, again, think how hard it would be if you were a converted slave and maybe now with your love for Christ and the gifts that you had, you were put in a position of leadership and think how much harder it would be for that slave owner now to submit to that loving authority or, again, for a Jew to submit to a Gentile or a Gentile to a Jew. So you still have some of that cultural baggage, no doubt, that was there. Now, we're not told the exact nature of the leadership problem that was going on there but apparently there was one so Paul addresses it head-on.

I also want to remind you that Paul has previously painted for them a very vivid picture of the heart of a godly leader, of a godly elder and pastor, a heart that therefore will help him transcend all of the social and cultural boundaries. Remember how the apostle spoke of his own leadership in parental terms beginning in, or actually in chapter 2, verse 7. He says, "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." What a beautiful picture of a godly leader: a man who has the reputation of being gentle, of being attentive, of tenderly caring for those that God has entrusted to him. He even said in verse 11 of chapter 2 as he reminds them of how he exhorted each one of them as a "father" he says, "would exhort his own children, so that you would

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walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." So this helps us see and it certainly helped them see the type of heart attitude that was really a prerequisite for a godly leader within the church.

It's also important for you to know that there are four New Testament terms. This is all good introductory material so that you really understand where the apostle is coming from and what's important in this passage, but there are four New Testament terms that are used to designate a leader. There is first of all, the presbyteros, it's translated "an elder," and that really underscores the concept of being spiritually mature; one who has the ability to exercise biblical discernment and so forth. And then there is the episkopos, which is translated "overseer" which emphasizes the role and responsibility of managing or exercising spiritual oversight and authority. Then there is the poimen which is the "pastor" or the "shepherd" which speaks of him as being a shepherd; that he is responsible therefore to lead and feed and care for a specific flock. Then there is the hegemon translated "leader" or "ruler," and that emphasizes the importance of the spiritual leader within the church of really guiding and governing the people.

I might also add that always in the New Testament Church you see that there is to be a plurality of elders. There is never one man that is in charge of the whole thing nor do you ever see a democracy. You don't see congregational rule. That produces chaos and fistfights. Trust me, I've been there before. No organization can function that way. Corporations can't function that way. Can you imagine if AT&T decided, "Well, we need to do something so let's call everybody together, give them the options, and let's vote on it." You'd never get anything done. I want to also add that if you want to see more specifically the qualifications of an elder, you can look at 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. And one other important footnote because I know it will come up, maybe not from you but from someone perhaps that's listening online, New Testament leaders and pastors were always designated to be male, never female. Females are not to function in a pastoral teaching role within the church. There are a number of passages that speak to this. I'll give you but one, 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul says, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." Obviously women play a huge role in in the church and can serve in many ways but in matters of rule and the family and in the church, the only two institutions that God has ordained and established, that leadership is reserved, that headship is reserved for the man. And, I might add, that in the New Testament church and certainly in the New Testament we see this, anytime there is female leadership, it is always in the context of defection. That is not God's design and those who argue otherwise demonstrate, frankly, a blatant disregard for the authority of Scripture. Scripture is very clear on this.

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So let's look closely at what God has to say through his apostle as it relates to the specific character and conduct of a shepherd and how the sheep should respond to them. We'll look first at three things that he talks about with respect to the character and conduct of a shepherd and then we will look at what he says and three ways the church should respond to them. First of all, notice he says that they diligently labor among you. Diligently labor. The term is one in the original language that is used to describe strenuous effort; labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion, and it really carries with it the idea of a great struggle. Obviously, Paul saw certain men within that congregation that exhibited a desire to work hard among the people and true shepherds are going to be those who are willing to exert themselves in caring for the sheep. I don't know where I heard it but it stuck with me, "True shepherds should smell like sheep," meaning you've got to be with the sheep. You've got to spend time with them. Now, to diligently labor among them does not describe, therefore, someone who has little time or energy to give to the flock, someone who wants to be a leader but really loves them very little and really has no time for them, but rather this describes a man who is seriously devoted to the flock, to shepherding the flock; one who will give every ounce of his energy for his life to the Gospel to see men and women, boys and girls, come to a saving knowledge of Christ and grow in him.

I might also add that this is what you should all look for in potential leaders. Some day, unless the Lord comes within the next, I don't know, 10 years, maybe 15 years, I will be gone. I may still be alive but you won't want me up here anymore and you will be looking for another pastor. There will be times when you will look for other associates and other elders. What you want to look for is not a man who says, "You know, I'm willing to give myself to that end, to work that strenuously." No, that's not the man you want. You want the man who has been proving that he is doing that and then you want to get behind him. Laziness in a church leader is a mark of disqualification. And Paul was such a marvelous example of this, this kind of strenuous effort. Again, if you look back at chapter 2, verse 9 of 1 Thessalonians, he said to them, "you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." And in Acts 20:20 that we read earlier in our Scripture reading, he described how he "did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house." Verse 31, he said, "night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one of you with tears." Paul described this as well in Galatians 4:19 where he likened his exertion to see people come to Christ and grow in Christ to that of a mother giving birth. He said, "I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." In other words, the priority of a shepherd is that of salvation which ultimately produces Christ likeness.

Now, specifically what does this labor look like? Let me give you but a few examples. If we look, for example, just at Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonians, we see 17 activities

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of a faithful pastor which include: praying, evangelizing, equipping, defending, loving, laboring, modeling, leading, feeding, watching, warning, teaching, exhorting, encouraging, correcting, confronting, rescuing. And he goes into great detail in 1 & 2 Timothy, I'll not take time to do that beyond what we have available to us today but in summary, Paul commanded Timothy to be faithful in his preaching of biblical truth; to be bold in exposing and refuting error; to be an example of godliness to the flock; to be diligent and work hard in the ministry; and to be willing to suffer hardship and persecution in his service for the Lord. So this is what it means to labor diligently among you.

I know and every faithful pastor and elder knows that my work is never done. You are on call 24/7. It is very labor intensive. Sometimes it is very stressful. At times it is exhausting. And in fact, I discourage any young man from ever going into the ministry, certainly being a pastor or even being an elder, unless there is irrefutable evidence that he is absolutely committed to this particular work that God has called him and God has gifted him to do this because, folks, biblical shepherding is not a life of ease nor is it a position or office of privilege. In fact, the great Scottish expositor, Eric Alexander, put it this way, quote, "The task of Christian leadership is not one of enjoying privilege or status or office but one of taking up responsibility like Paul who said of himself, 'working harder than any of you.'"

So, first, a leader must labor diligently among the flock. Secondly, he reminds them that they have charge over you in the Lord. Now, to have charge over you in the original language carries the idea of presiding over or directing, leading, governing, even protecting, so it's as if you could say here, "Those who stand before you as protectors, as leaders in the Lord." And we know biblically that under shepherds of the chief shepherd like the elders at Thessalonica, had to rely upon the Holy Spirit to shepherd the flock consistently with, frankly, the list that I just read and their dedicated leadership would therefore protect the flock from predatory false teachers and from the disease of sin that could enter into the church and basically devastate the flock. As your pastor, I am constantly reminded of a number of texts but one in particular, Hebrews 13:17 where I am told that I will one day have to give an account over how I kept watch care over your soul. This cannot be done merely from a pulpit. Frankly, preaching is the easy part of shepherding. It requires intentional relational involvement. Sometimes it requires giving you a phone call. Sometimes it requires confronting you. Sometimes it requires encouraging you and weeping with you. Sometimes it even requires church discipline so that one can be restored to fellowship.

But will you also notice in this text before us that true Christian leaders in Christ's church have no personal authority nor do they have any claim to being, shall we say, self-

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appointed. They have charge over you, he says, in the Lord. In other words, in union with the Lord. This speaks of one whose functions are guided by the character and the will of the Lord. I thought about this. What does it mean for me, for example, to have charge over you in the Lord and my mind went to a passage of Scripture in Mark 10. You might recall there Jesus is dealing with James and John and you remember how their pride had gotten the best of them and they were continually hounding Jesus to make sure that he would promise them that they could sit on the right and left hand in the kingdom, do you remember that? And you can read in the text that the disciples were getting so sick of this it says that the other 10 finally became just indignant with them and so Jesus is dealing with this and here we really understand the pattern of leadership that every leader should have when he is functioning in the Lord. He said this in verse 42 of Mark 10, "Calling them to Himself," don't you love that? You can almost see that. "Guys, come here, come here. Sit down. I want to talk to you." It's almost like, "I've had enough of this. Sit down here." "Jesus said to them, 'You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" Folks, this is the kind of heart attitude that validates whether or not a church leader has charge over you in the Lord. Church leadership is not a platform for self-indulgence. It is not a platform for self-service where a man sets himself apart as superior. No, church leadership is the place to serve, not be served. We have charge over you in the Lord.

You know, there is nothing more devastating in a church than having Barney Fife for a pastor. Do you remember Barney? As I say, he's got a bullet and a badge and a little black book and he's taking names and everybody is in jail. You just don't want that in a pastor. In Africa I remember on several occasions I was introduced as, and this is a variation, sometimes they would have other things but I remember one in particular, I even wrote it down, I was introduced to a body of believers as "The Most Right Reverend Bishop Dr. David A. Harrell." I'm glad it was most right rather than mostly right but anyway, I was quick to very tactfully and graciously dispel any perception of superiority and I would always let them know that, "I'm so glad to be with you but please understand that I am a mere slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a gracious and glorious and loving Master and I am here to serve you." You see, folks, our uniform, if you will, is not some ostentation garb like that of the Roman Catholic pope. Not some type of robe of superiority. We do not wear a badge. We don't wear some special hat that designates us to be a spiritual authority. The uniform of God's leader within his church is a slave's apron, if you will. We must be like Jesus, serving in humility and self-sacrifice, virtues that, frankly, must spring forth from a reservoir of just love and knowledge of Christ. This was the very essence of the Lord's leadership, wasn't it? The Son of Man did not come to be served but

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to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Peter described this in 1 Peter 5, you're familiar with this text. In verse 1 he began saying, "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." Folks, this is what it means to have charge over a church in the Lord.

And if I could speak for a moment specifically to my fellow elders and pastors, I know there are many that listen through the internet. I have discovered over the years that my greatest enemy is not Satan and his minions and doctrines of demons that are disseminated that come in and rip apart the church. It's not even false teachers. My greatest enemy is not even rebellious sheep within the congregation, my greatest enemy is my own pride. That will be your greatest enemy. I confess like any other man, I struggle with it. By the power of the Spirit, I have tried to kill that monster every day of my life and it's for this reason God must continually work to humble us. This is going to be a lifelong process and he's going to bring great difficulties into your life for that very purpose. I think of the Apostle Paul and his thorn in the flesh. Why was it given to him? To keep him from exalting himself. So too will it be with every servant of God.

Paul's life was such a great example. He said in 1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as slaves of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Remember in 2 Corinthians 4:7, he described himself as an earthen vessel, a disposable clay pot. As I reflected upon this, I was reminded of something that I had read years ago from a Puritan, his name was Walter Craddock, he gave a description of the humble man that illustrates this so perfectly and certainly puts me to shame as I think of it. He said, "A humble man is this, when he looks upon another man that is a sinner, he considereth that he has been worse than he. Secondly, a humble heart thinks himself to be worse. Number 3, it is God that hath made it and not anything in himself. Then fourthly, he considereth that the vilest sinner may be in God's good time, better than he."

You know, I have learned over the years that God uses the fires of adversity to continue to burn away remaining pride in my heart and also to temper the steel of my faith. J. Oswald Sanders put it this way, "No one need aspire to leadership in the work of God who is not prepared to pay a price greater than his contemporaries and colleagues are willing to pay. True leadership always exacts a heavy toll on the whole man and the more effective the leadership is, the higher the price to be paid." You know, I continue to learn how suffering oftentimes in secret is really a crucible of God's grace. He uses that in mighty ways to reveal himself to put me where I need to be and where I need to stay and

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where my heart resents. Spurgeon gives a reason pastors may expect suffering. He said this, "It is of need be that we are sometimes in heaviness. Good men are promised tribulation in this world and ministers may expect a larger share than others that they may learn sympathy with the Lord's suffering people and so may be fitting shepherds of an ailing flock." So, men, we must bear this in mind as we fulfill the task of shepherding.

We diligently labor among the flock. We have charge over them in the Lord. But thirdly, Paul tells the saints that they give you instruction. The term in the original language is *noutheteo*, we get our word *nouthetic* counseling from that. It means to warn: to instruct; it means to counsel. It's often translated "to admonish." It means also "to correct." You see, this is the goal of our instruction to you so that you will know the word of God, you will be able to apply the word of God, you will be able to live out the promises of the word of God, the joy, the blessings of your justification and ultimately be more conformed into the likeness of Christ. And any shepherd who fails to properly feed his sheep will eventually experience the miserable consequence of their malnourished souls. Our responsibility is to feed the sheep, not please the sheep. Our responsibility is to nourish your souls, not tickle your ears. Of course, this will run the goats away but it will also keep the wolves at bay.

Now, regarding this matter of giving instruction, we see qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and those all have to do with character issues except for one and that is the ability to teach the Scriptures; to be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. Now, of course, every faithful elder and pastor will vary in this regard. Some will have a better understanding of the word of God than others. Some will have more education. They will be more seasoned. They may be more skilled, more gifted, more wise in how to practically apply the word of God to the issues of life, but without this, without this knowledge and skill and, frankly, commitment to really know the word and proclaim the word and apply the word, without that you will be an ineffective shepherd and the sheep will be malnourished and they will never grow in the grace of the knowledge of Christ and they will typically run off in every direction, typically over the cliff, and destroy themselves. They will remain immature, baby Christians. And how often do we see this? You may want to examine your own heart. People with no appetite for the word of God. They can go from Sunday to Sunday and have absolutely no thought of spiritual things which, by the way, really begs the question if you really even know Christ. They have no hunger for the word, no desire to have their soul nourished and certainly they have no appetite for the deeper doctrines of Scripture and how to apply it to their life. Paul dealt with this, remember, in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3. Beginning in verse 1, he says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet

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able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

So the faithful elder and pastor is to give instruction, and I would ask you to ask yourself: am I teachable? Am I willing to be warned, corrected, admonished, counseled by someone whom God has called and gifted and placed in authority over me or do I resent that? Those who are teachable will benefit greatly. By the way, we give you many opportunities to be instructed here at Calvary Bible Church both publicly and privately but those who aren't willing to be instructed will never grow into spiritual maturity, assuming that they're regenerate in the first place. Their life, their marriage, their family will continue to be a soap opera and over time it will bring great misery to their soul; it will bring destruction to their health; their lives will be a reproach to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, notice the kind of attitude the church family should have toward their servant leaders. Three things, let me read it again, verse 12, "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another." So there are three things here: you are to appreciate them; esteem them in love; and submit to them.

Let's look at this first one, what does he mean here? 1. He says in verse 12, "we request of you, brethren," which literally means we urge you, we are pleading with you to live obediently to this instruction that we have given you as apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. "We request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you." Now, this is a little bit different than what you may think. "Appreciate" in the original language translates a very common Greek verb, oida, which literally means "to know by experience." What he's saying here is we want you to know by experience your leaders. We want you to get to know them personally, experientially. Know what makes them tick, if you will. Know their love for Christ. Know their passion for the word. Know their love for you and as a result, you will respect them. You will appreciate who they are and what they have been called and gifted to do for your good and God's glory and then you will follow them. By the way, effective shepherds do not herd their sheep from the rear, they lead them from the front. That's why if there's ever times where the sheep are resistant to the leadership of the shepherd, the first thing we must do is ask what's wrong with the shepherd, not what's wrong with the sheep. Now, it may be a problem more with the sheep than the shepherd but you must begin with the shepherd. Spurgeon says it takes seven years for the sheep to get to know their shepherd and learn to trust him. I don't know, he may just be using hyperbole a bit but I think there's probably some merit to that. Many believers only know their pastors and their elders from a distance then when, not if,

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Preached on: Sunday, April 17, 2016

we do something that you don't like, that you don't understand or agree with, assuming that it's something unbiblical, that is not unbiblical, you what? You become disrespectful, you become critical and then you run off and you know the rest of the story.

No, this appreciation, this personal knowledge by experience will also really motivate you to be willing to do something else that we're told to do. Paul said in 1 Timothy 5:17, he says, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." Here he's referring to supporting your staff leaders financially. He says, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" And Paul even elaborates on this further in 1 Corinthians 9:14, "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." I remember the first five years or so here at Calvary Bible Church. I had to work bi-vocationally and God gave me strength to do that but that was very difficult. You simply do not have the time or the physical stamina to do the work that needs to be done as a shepherd and I was so thankful when God finally raised up enough people where I could actually put food on the table and spend my whole time doing this.

So the church has a responsibility to appreciate their leader. Secondly, he says you are to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Now, it's interesting, "esteem" means "to regard, to think about," and when he says think about them very highly, it literally means beyond all measure. Now, this is always uncomfortable for me because I feel self-serving here but I want to tell you this is what the text says. And here what's happening is the apostle is moving beyond the standard that he first mentioned with respect to appreciating your leaders due to your deep personal knowledge of who they are, but here now you are told to esteem them very highly. It literally means to think about them in the highest way possible. Hold them in the highest regard. So this goes way beyond being dutiful and just submitting to a person of a higher rank. This has to do with a deep personal regard that is rooted in love and characterized by love so this is what bonds our hearts together. And by the way, how I appreciate this kind of attitude among those of you that are here at Calvary Bible Church and I'm sure Paul appreciated this. Do you realize Paul suffered from some kind of a repulsive disease. We believe that it was related to his eyes for a number of reasons but we know that the saints looked beyond his human frailties over which he had no control and they still loved him. In fact, he expressed as much in Galatians 4:14. He said to them, "that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me." A perfect example of esteeming them very highly in love because of their work.

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A Proper Response to Church Leaders

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
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Well, he closes then, not only should you appreciate your leaders and esteem them very highly in love because of their work but finally, you should submit to them. Notice at the end of verse 13, he says, "Live in peace with one another." This is a very familiar admonition to the church in regards to its responsibility not only toward one another but especially toward church leadership. You see, this is the opposite of living in conflict and rebellion and strife and discord and disharmony. It's only when faithful pastors and faithful congregations work in harmony with one another that we will be able to truly proclaim the Gospel of Christ and unfortunately this isn't always the case. Sometimes the sheep can be very ignorant and stubborn and self-willed. Some of the pastors that I'm mentoring right now lament over this, especially those who have been placed into churches where there is congregational rule and everybody has got a voice and a vote and they're fighting amongst one another all the time. It's just chaos. The writer of Hebrews speaks to this. He said this in Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." That's where he begins, remember those. I remember those who spoke truth into my life over the years. I even remember as I look back the Puritan saints who stood against apostasy. I think of the Puritan saints whose lives were dedicated to holiness. Their lives were governed by the word of God, guided by the sovereignty of God. They were dedicated to the five Solas of the Reformation that we see presented so beautifully around this worship center.

So he says, "I want you to remember them," and then he gets more specific. "Here's what I want you to do," in verse 17, "Obey your leaders." Remember those who did this in the past, now in the present, I want you to obey your leaders, "and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Then he said this, "Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things."

May I challenge you with three things very briefly as we close this morning. First of all, you brothers that are fellow elders and pastors, we need to look at this and re-examine our lives, don't we? Every time I read these things, I just feel like, "I quit. I need to give up. I'm convicted." Then by God's grace, you know, you get your thumb out of your mouth and you go back to it, right? But may I challenge each member of Calvary Bible Church to do the same thing with respect to your God-given responsibilities.

I'd like for you to do three things. 1. Make it a priority to really get to know your church leaders, will you? If you don't know your elders that well, ask them over for hamburgers and tell them to bring the burgers, okay? But get to know them. Get to know me if you don't know me that well. You'll be surprised how God can use that type of interaction

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especially if there's an elder you're not quite sure of or a pastor you're not quite sure of. Let's talk. Let's get to know one another and watch what the Spirit of God can do as he knits our hearts together in love.

Secondly, will you make it a priority to pray for us as the writer of Hebrews just said? Folks, we are just men. We struggle with the same kinds of things that you struggle with. Our calling and our gifts may be different but we need your prayers. "Pray for us for we are sure that we have a good conscience," verse 18 of Hebrews 13, he says, "desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things."

Then, finally, if you examine your heart and you see that there is some policy or there is something that we're doing or whatever that causes you to bristle, that causes you to resent your leadership, may I challenge you to come and talk to us about that? I don't know that there is that but every now and then I'll find out something but, folks, the godly thing to do is to come to us and to say, "I don't understand this. I resent this or I don't agree with whatever." Then let's enjoy an opportunity of real reconciliation. Just think what we could do in this church when we all work together in harmony the way God has called us to do.

Well, these are very practical things, aren't they? And I'm excited as we continue on. The next time we will learn about a proper response to sinning church members, those who are struggling in those areas so we'll look forward to that.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for what we have learned again today. Help us to apply these things to our heart and, Lord, as always, if there is one here that really does not know what it means to walk in obedience and love and fellowship with the living God, that really has no appetite for the word, that really lacks humility, one who lacks that soul satisfying joy of the presence of God deep within their souls, even in the midst of great adversity, Lord, that one clearly does not know you and I beg you to bring conviction to their heart and to save them this very day. So we thank you for all that you are teaching us. Bless us as we endeavor to serve you for it is in Christ's name and for his sake that I pray. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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